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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000919

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: ADMIRAL WILLIAM J. FALLON MEETING WITH OMANI
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

REF: MUSCAT 870

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alfred F. Fonteneau for Reasons 1.4 (b
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SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi discussed both Iraq and Iran during a September 19 meeting with CENTCOM Commander Admiral William J. Fallon. Bin Alawi noted the many challenges facing efforts to stabilize Iraq, including competing factions and militia groups, but remained optimistic and encouraged U.S. moves to transfer greater responsibility for security to the government of PM Maliki. The Minister claimed that Iran wanted to help end violence in Iraq and advocated "enhanced" dialogue between Washington and Tehran. He conceded that getting the Iranians to be more cooperative on its nuclear program and other issues would be difficult, but asserted that serious engagement with Tehran would likely yield positive results. End Summary.

IRAQ

¶2. (C) Admiral Fallon, CENTCOM Commander, met September 19 in Muscat with Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi. Turning first to the situation in Iraq, Bin Alawi said he found the recent Congressional testimony of General Petraeus to be "very informative." He stated that he tried to remain optimistic about the future of Iraq, but added that several difficult challenges remained. He questioned, for example, the loyalties of some of the officers of the Iraqi security forces, and reiterated his view that PM Maliki needed to act and see himself as the leader of all Iraqis, rather than of only certain groups. Bin Alawi also lauded remarks by President Bush on the gradual change in role of the U.S. military in Iraq, commenting that this would help make the Iraqi government realize that it must stand more on its own.

¶3. (C) According to bin Alawi, there is much concern and "re-examining" within the GCC, and in Kuwait in particular, about Iraq. Any "vacuum" created by a withdrawal or repositioning of U.S./coalition forces, he warned, would have to be filled by legitimate local officials, although competing factions and militias would make this difficult. Bin Alawi noted that Iran maintained "strong" relations with certain Iraqi groups, but claimed that Tehran was looking for stability in Iraq and had tried to quell violence in the southern region by appealing to Muqtada al-Sadr and his followers for restraint. He further opined that the Iraqi

government should seek to reach an agreement with Shi'a militia leaders, rather than send security forces to directly confront the armed groups, in order to avoid further bloodshed.

¶4. (C) Bin Alawi emphasized that both the U.S. and Iran supported PM Maliki and his efforts to improve security. While commenting that Maliki was at times problematic, bin Alawi added that replacing him would be very difficult as there was no other PM candidate acceptable to the majority of Iraqis. In any case, bin Alawi continued, the Iraqis should take care of their own day-to-day matters and quarrels and look less to the outside for help. He also expressed approval for coalition attempts to engage tribal leaders - particularly in Anbar province - to fight al-Qa'eda, noting that the Sultanate had employed a similar tactic in defeating a communist-led rebellion in southern Oman in the 1970s. Bin Alawi further stated that the GCC would benefit from more "clarification" on U.S. plans for Iraq, though he added that "no one" thought that a reduction in the U.S. presence in Iraq would signal a lessening of U.S. interests there.

IRAN

¶5. (C) Asked by Admiral Fallon how the U.S. could move ahead with Iran, bin Alawi replied that the U.S.-Iran dialogue started in Baghdad should be "enhanced" so as to include officials who are closer to decision-makers in their respective capitals. Admiral Fallon responded that Tehran had so far sent only intelligence and security officials to the talks, rather than real diplomats. After a pause, bin Alawi stated that the Iranian government administrative

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system was inefficient and complex, and conceded that getting Tehran to be more cooperative would "not be easy." But he emphasized that engaging top Iranian officials would likely eventually yield positive results.

¶6. (C) Turning briefly to Iran's nuclear program, bin Alawi said that he earnestly hoped the matter would be resolved peacefully. He explained that regional security issues had long been a source of discussion between Gulf countries and Iran, even during the time of the Shah, and that the Iranians always understood that they needed to reach an accommodation with their neighbors. Bin Alawi recalled a conversation he had in the 1980s with former Iranian President Rafsanjani during which he firmly stated that Oman would not change its cooperative relationship with the West even under pressure from Tehran. Rafsanjani had responded, according to bin Alawi, that Iran was not seeking any such change and would not attempt to impose its views on Oman. Bin Alawi stated that he talked with current Iranian President Ahmadinejad, but commented that "his school of thought is small" and that many in the Iranian leadership did not share his views.

¶7. (C) Bin Alawi concluded the meeting by thanking Admiral Fallon for his visit. The Minister added that he hoped to visit CENTCOM headquarters in Tampa in the near future for further discussions.

¶8. (U) Admiral Fallon has reviewed this message.
FONTENEAU